

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture - 14

Part B

Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Criticism

Hello and welcome back, this is module 2 of the course on Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism. In our last class, we looked at a lot of Freudian terminologies and in today's class, we will start off by looking at some of the concepts and ideas promoted by Carl Gustavo Jung, who was Freud's disciple and Portege, before they parted ways. Now, Carl Gustavo Jung is instrumental in that he differed from Sigmund Freud very significantly towards the later part of his career. He was instrumental in developing something that we know today as archetypal criticism.

Now, archetypal criticism is a school of literary criticism that concerns itself with the idea of archetypes. Now, archetypes themselves are things that denote narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, as well as images, which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature. Now, by wide variety of works of literature, I mean across time and space. For example, archetypal characters might be found in a novel that was published in the 16th century as well as something that was published in the 20th century.

Archetypal themes and patterns might also be found in something that was published in India as well as something that was published in Australia. So, archetypes also figure very prominently in myths, dreams and even social rituals and customs. Now, such recurrent images and patterns are thought to be a result of an elemental and universal forms and patterns in the human psyche. And an embodiment of these patterns and images in literary works are thought to evoke a very strong emotional response in the reader of such a cultural artifact, such a text.

For instance, we have archetypes for characters, a classic example; a classic character trope would be that of hero archetype. A hero archetype is perhaps embodied by a person, who is traditionally and cross culturally seen as someone, who is brave, strong,

heroic and noble and such characters can be found across cultures. For example, we have the character of Hercules and who is complimented by someone like Bhima or Arjuna in an Indian mythology.

To give you another example, we have the character of Karna, who can be strongly compared to the character of Achilles from Greek mythology. Likewise, the death rebirth theme is also said to be the mother of all archetypes, the archetype of all archetypes. And this is said to be grounded in the cycle of the seasons and the organic cycle of human life and this archetype occurs in primitive rituals also. For example, in the rituals of the king or the myth of the king, who is ritually sacrificed to be reborn over and over again and in stories and myths of Gods, who die and or reborn over and over again.

Now, such themes can be seen in a diverse and multitude and diverse text, such as texts ranging from the Bible to Dante's divine comedy that was published in the early 14th century. And even in Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner, which was published in 1819. So, you can see how these diverse texts still rely on the same recurrent pattern or motive.

Now, although we understand Carl Gustav Jung to be a disciple of Freud, his version of death psychology is rather very different from the theories that Freud himself advocated. Now, that is how a union criticism, union archetypal criticism differs radically from psychoanalytic criticism. Now, the key difference here that we need to understand is that, Jung's emphasis is not on the individual unconscious, no it is not on the personal or indeed individual unconscious, unlike Freud.

Instead his emphasis what he called the collective unconscious, which is something that he understood to be shared by all individuals across all cultures, which he regards as the repository of racial memories and primordial images and patterns of experience that he also called archetypes. So, while Freud viewed literature as a disguised form of a sort of a well wish fulfillment.

Jung regards literature as an expression of the archetypes from the collective unconscious. Therefore, according to Jung, a great author would provide for his readers access to archetypal images that are buried deep within his or her racial memory. Thus, granting access to images that are integral and relevant both to the individual as well as the human race at the same time.

To give you an example, an archetypal person, who practices archetypal criticism would perhaps argue that. The reason why human beings have a tendency to settle alongside water bodies is that being in water gives one the idea of a, it evokes a very strong primordial racial memory of that of being suspended in water, while he was a fetus in his mother's womb.

So, this affinity towards being suspended in water is perhaps what draws people to settle down and make civilization, perhaps close to water bodies would be, perhaps in argument that our union critic would make. As you can see, thus Hume's theory of literature has been an important definitive formative influence on archetypal criticism and myth criticism.

So, now, that we have concluded our brief introduction to Freudian and union psychoanalytic criticism, we shall now attempt to sum up, what a Freudian psychoanalytic critic would perhaps seek to accomplish. A Freudian psychoanalytic critic would as you recall give central importance in literary interpretation to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious elements of one's mind.

They would for example, associate the literary works overt content and structure, which is to say, it is story and plot devices etcetera, with that of the conscious mind and the covert content which is the hidden content with the unconscious elements of his psyche. Privileging off course the unconscious over the conscious, a psychoanalytic critic would also pay close attention to the unconscious motives and feelings, whether these belong to that of the characters or the characters within a particular text or of that of the author himself.

They also make large scale applications of psychoanalytic concepts to literary history in general. For example, you might recall, how we talked about Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence in our last module. Bloom sees the struggle for identity by each generation of poets under the threat of the looming greatness of his predecessors. And this is seen by Harold Bloom as an enactment of the Oedipus complex itself.

Now, a psychoanalytic critic would also privilege the individual psychology at the expense of a social or a historical context. Freud would as I mentioned earlier, Freud was interested in the personal unconscious rather than the collective unconscious. And he

would also privilege the personal unconscious over the conflict between perhaps a social classes as a Marxian critic would perhaps do.

Now, to give you a practical flavor of how a psychoanalytic might approach a literary text, we have the case of a Shakespeare's hamlet. Shakespeare's hamlet was famously psychoanalyzed by a Freud himself and for those of you, who are not familiar with the plot and story of hamlet. Let me quickly remind you, in Shakespeare's play, hamlet is a prince, whose father has been murdered by his own brother, which is to say hamlets father has been murdered by hamlet's uncle.

And not only has the king been murdered by his brother, the king's wife is also now in the possession of this new king, which is to say that hamlet's mother has been is married to a hamlet's uncle now. Now, in the play, the ghost of hamlet's father appears to hamlet in an apparition and he wants his son to avenge his death. The ghost wants hamlet to kill a hamlet's uncle to avenge the king's death.

Now, we understand that there is no obvious difficulty for hamlet in achieving this, but throughout the play, we see that hamlet's is forever making excuses to not actually you know avenge his father's death. Now, we wonder why? Why is hamlet reluctant to you know dispose of his uncle and seek justice and to avenge his father's death. We know that hamlet is not particularly squeamish, he is not that he is a worst the idea of murder, we see that hamlet is capable of killing a lot of other characters within the play span.

So, why does he keep on making excuses and moreover, what we need to understand is that, what the ghost tells hamlet only confirms the suspicions that hamlet has already had regarding the murder of his father. And yet, he plans on yet he forever keeps on delaying his plans of revenge, why is this? So, this is where psychoanalytic criticism offers us a very neat and simple solution.

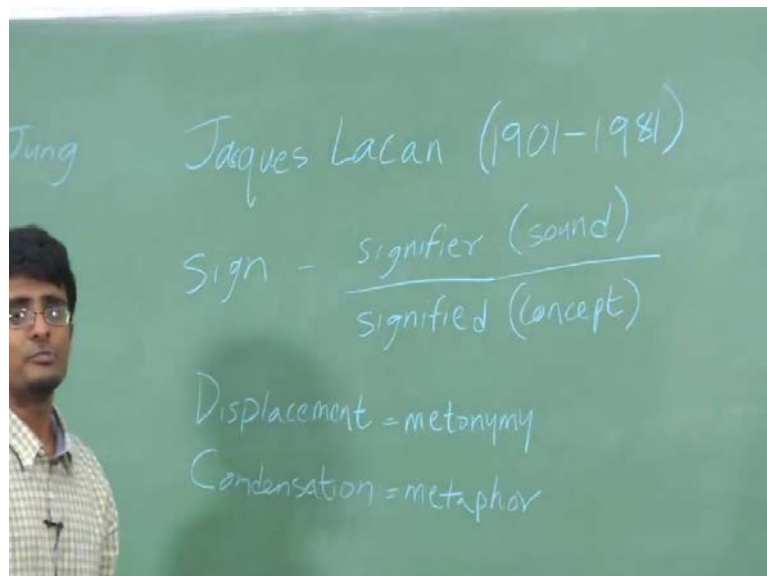
Now, Freud tells us that hamlet cannot avenge this crime, because he is guilty of wanting to commit the crime himself. At this point, I would like to draw your attention to the idea of Oedipus complex that we discussed in the first module. Freud claims that, hamlet has an Oedipus complex; that is he has a repressed and unconscious sexual desire for his own mother and a consequent wish to do away with his father.

Thus, what hamlet's uncle has done is to merely do what hamlet has always wanted to do. He has eliminated his father and possessed his mother and this is precisely how hamlet faces the difficulty of avenging his father's death. Now, this view of the play was first sketched out by Freud and his work, the interpretation of dreams, which was published in 1900.

Now, interestingly Freud does not stop there, he links the situation of hamlet to that of Shakespeare himself, sighting the view that, this play was written immediately after the death of Shakespeare's own father in 1601. And this is the point of time, where Shakespeare's own childhood feelings about his father might have been freshly revived. And Freud adds quote, it is known to that Shakespeare's own son, who died at an early age bore the name of hamlet which is identical to that of hamlet unquote.

The sketch for an interpretation of the play that was thus put forward by Freud was later developed by his British colleague Ernest Jones in his work hamlet and Oedipus, which was published in 1949. And with that, we conclude our brief discussion of Sigmund Freud and a Carl Gustavo Jung and we come to the next big name, when it comes psychoanalytic literary criticism and that is, that of Jacques Lacan.

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Lacan, who was born between, who lived between 1901 and 1981 also has a considerable amount of influence on psychoanalytic theory and criticism. Lacan was a French psychoanalyst, whose work has had a tremendous and extraordinary impact upon

many aspects of recent literary theory. Now, like Freud, Lacan began his career by taking a medical degree and then, training in psychiatry during the 1920's.

Subsequently his ideas were also vastly influenced by other prominent literary figures, such as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and even, Roman Jakobson. The perhaps the most important text literary text for Lacan in interpretation, when it comes to the students of literatures, perhaps this text known as the insistence of the letter in the unconscious, which was first delivered as a lecture in 1957 to a lay audience of philosophy students.

Lacan maintains that language is central to psychoanalysis, because in investigating the unconscious, the psychoanalyst always resorts to the use of examining and using language. In effect, Freudian psychology is almost entirely a verbal science, you might recall, how we discussed the idea of reassociation in the context of James Bond's presentation in a film like Skyfall, this validates our assumption there.

According to Lacan, the unconscious is not the chaotic mass of desperate material as might have formerly been assumed. For Lacan, the unconscious is very much structure, it is structure like a language. So, what he maintains is that, what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is basically the whole structure of language itself.

So, Lacan is basically attending a marriage between linguistics and psychoanalysis and that is perhaps his most important contribution. The unconscious in Lacan's most famous slogan is structured like a language. But, how is this structure achieved. Lacan maintains that modern language studies begins with the arrival of Saussure, who shows that meaning in a language is basically a matter of contrast and difference between words.

So, what we have is basically meaning that is generated through a difference and contrast between words and not between words and things. Meaning thus becomes basically a network of differences, through a study of linguistics; we know that signs are composed of signifiers and signifieds. A signifier is basically a phonetic symbol, a phonetic utterance, a four letter word that would perhaps imply the existence of a tree.

The signified on the other hand is the content is the concept of the idea of the tree itself. So, that is how we say that a sign is composed of a phonetic aspect as well as the

conceptual or the idea itself. Linguistic tells us that signifies or can only relate to one another. So, for example, if I were to tell you, what a town is, I would probably have to explain it in relation to what a villages. For example, I could always make the argument that a town is a very large village.

But, as you can see that does not really tell us a lot, we are just substituting the town with that of a village and this is precisely, where Lacan comes in. He claims that the actual signified is a meaning that is perpetually deferred. Meaning is not accessible to us it forever slips us, it always eludes us. There is a perpetual barrier between, what is signified and the signifier itself. There is a barrier between the word and a concept.

Hence, we are forced to accept the incessant slipping of the signified under the signifier as you can see from the diagram on top. Now, following this, this is the basis on from which he develops his perhaps more significant contribution. Following this Lacan argues that the dream work, the two dream work mechanisms identified by Freud, which we discussed in our earlier module, which is condensation and displacement.

Correspond to the basic poles of language itself; that are identified by the linguist roman Jakobson, which is to say, this corresponds to metaphor and metonymy respectively. The correspondence here is that in metonymy one thing represents another by means of the part standing for a whole, which is to say that perhaps. If you if you are seeking a cola you might ask for a Pepsi instead of asking for you know a cola in general.

Thus in Freudian dream interpretation, an element in a dream might stand for something else by displacement. For example, going back to our previous example, a lover who is in this case Italian might be represented in a dream by an extension of something an attribute of his. For example, an Italian lover might be represented in a dream as an Italian car, you know for example, an Alfa Romeo or a Ferrari.

Lacan says, Lacan maintains that this is the same as metonymy, the part standing for the whole. Similarly, in condensation, several things might be condensed and compressed into one symbol, just like a metaphor. For example, consider the expression, he is a snake in the grass, this is a common expression, this is a common metaphor that refers to someone, who is perhaps not visibly bad or dangerous. But, has eventually turned a traitor, he is therefore, like snake in the grass, you know someone who is not easily visible, but someone, who is capable of biting without warning.

Therefore adapting the Lacan in outlook would involve value in the modernist or the postmodernist experimental fragmented elusive text. Therefore, instance a novel might play with the devices of the novel itself or might value to other novels and so on. Lacan's foregrounding of the unconscious also leads him to speculate about the mechanism by which we emerge into consciousness itself.

Now, Lacan says that before a sense of self can be established, a young child exist in the realm of what Lacan calls, the imaginary. In the imaginary, there is no distinction between the self and the other and there is a kind of idolized identification with the mother. Then, between 6 months and 18 months, the child goes through what Lacan called a mirror stage.

This is a stage wherein the child sees his own reflection in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself, it starts understanding that, it is a unique individual of it is own, which has it is own identity that is separate from the rest of the world. Now, this mirror need not be an actual physical mirror, it can be the portal through which the child interacts with the external world.

For example, every time a parent comes and talks to the child or touches it, it realizes that, it has an identity of it is own that it is a separate entity that is capable of interacting that the world around it. And it is at this point, that Lacan claims that the child enters the language system, which is basically essentially a system; that is concerned with ideas of lack and separation, something that separates itself from the imaginary.

Ideas of lack and separation are also crucial Lacanian's concepts, since as Lacan pointed out language names, what is not present or substitutes a linguistic sign for what cannot be tangibly perceived. This stage also significantly marks the beginning of a child's socialization, you know with it is prohibitions and with it is restrictions, with loss and order and similarly, as you can imagine this is associated with the figure of the father.

So, while the imaginary as associated with the mother, the symbolic, the initiation into language is associated with the fact that of the father figure. And with that, we conclude our second module, we will conclude this lecture with an exploration of how practically Lacanian criticism can be used, see you in the next module.

Thank you very much.